

Republican budget divisions broke into the open on the House floor on Friday as conservatives sought to cut tens of billions more from a government-wide spending bill — only to be turned back by leading GOP members working in alliance with Democrats.

The 284-147 defeat came as weary lawmakers headed into the final hours of a four day-and-long night debate that also saw two smaller, more colorful cuts fall by the wayside Friday: NASCAR sponsorships paid for by the military and subsidies to Brazilian cotton interests paid by the U.S. to protect subsidies at home.

The central event was an amendment from the conservative Republican Study Committee to cut an additional \$22 billion from domestic and foreign-aid spending, pushing these accounts all the way back to appropriations levels in the last years of the George W. Bush administration.

“The American people are ahead of us. They are asking us to go one step forward,” said Rep. Joe Walsh (R-Ill.), urging his colleagues to “be bold.” But he and fellow GOP freshmen met strong resistance from veteran lawmakers who built a solid bipartisan alliance around the House Appropriations Committee.

Republicans split 147-92 for the amendment with House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) supporting the added cuts. But with Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) standing behind the committee — and Democrats in solid opposition — the provision failed.

“I’m very pleased,” Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) told POLITICO.

Both the depth of the cuts and their 5.5 percent across-the-board style were at issue. “We were elected to make choices, not run on automatic pilot,” Rogers argued, and Rep. Kay Granger (R-Tex.) warned that the combined cuts from State Department and foreign-aid funding could reach \$12.5 billion — threatening aid to front-line states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. “This just goes too far,” Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) said most directly.

**“All this amendment does is ask the government to spend what it spent two years ago,”**  
countered

**Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)**

**“Most Americans would probably like to do that. Why is that such a devastation?”**

**“This amendment does not threaten government services. It is actually a step toward saving them.”**

Democrats, already faced with the prospect of \$60 billion in immediate cuts in the underlying bill, were unyielding.

“This is a meat-ax approach on top of a meat-ax approach. It is a double meat-ax approach!” burst out the oft excitable Rep. Norm Dicks, the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations panel. Then calming himself, the good-humored Washington state congressman turned himself into the committee’s master-of-ceremonies: yielding time for a succession of Republican Appropriations cardinals so they could make their pitch against their GOP colleagues in the RSC.

Watching with raised eyebrows was Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), a long-time RSC activist and newcomer new to the Appropriations world.

“Where we’re going here is a rounding error compared with what we’re going to have to do with entitlement spending,” he said, belittling the Appropriations Committee complaints about the extra \$22 billion in cuts. But just as striking was how few of Flake’s RSC mates seemed to bring their deficit fever to targets closer to home: the millions paid to NASCAR each year, for example, or the tens of millions now going to Brazil cotton growers as well.

It was Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) who raised the issue of the Army paying millions a year to NASCAR for costly sponsorships to attract recruits — a practice the Marines found ineffective, she said.

“This amendment is where the rubber meets the road for my Republican tea party colleagues who want to cut wasteful spending,” McCollum taunted the GOP.

But only 30 Republicans joined her in seeking to end the practice, with her amendment failing 281-148.

Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.) fared better but still lost after Republicans lined up more than 2-1 against his amendment to end the practice of the U.S. paying \$147 million a year to Brazilian cotton interests to protect growers at home.

The unusual arrangement grew out of a WTO ruling that the current U.S. cotton program is illegal, and until a new farm bill is written next year, the administration has agreed to the added payments so as to forestall much bigger retaliatory trade sanctions affecting a wider array of American industries.

Rep. Mike Conaway — from Texas cotton country and a member of both the RSC and the House Agriculture Committee — argued that what Kind proposed amounted to “a vote to institute a trade war with Brazil” and would jeopardize intellectual property rights of American companies.

“What’s really ironic in this debate is that cotton prices are at an all-time high in the market place,” Kind answered. “And there is still the built-up resistance in this institution to get to the hard work of reforming these farm subsidy programs.”